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New Census data underscores need to make college available to all residents

OLYMPIA— Newly released data from the U.S. Census show that during the past decade, Washington added hundreds of thousands of new residents in racial or ethnic categories that are underrepresented in Washington's higher education system.

According to data from the 2010 Census, Washington's fastest growing population category was Hispanics or Latinos. They still trail most other groups in college participation, although their participation level has been increasing in recent years, thanks in part to the availability of financial assistance, college preparation programs such as GEAR UP, and other factors.

Data prepared by the HECB last year showed that Hispanics accounted for approximately 11.9 percent of the state population in 2009, but received only 5 percent of the bachelor's degrees and 6.2 percent of the associate degrees awarded that year.

Income levels and lack of previous family experience with higher education are factors that may help account for the lower college-participation rates of some groups.

In 2010, the Hispanic or Latino population stood at 755,790, a 71percent increase from 2000. Overall, Washington's population grew 14.1 percent during the decade.

Over the same decade, Washington's Asian population grew by 49.2 percent (to 481,067), Blacks or African Americans by 26.2 percent (to 240,042), Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders by 69 percent (to 40,475), and American Indian/Alaska Natives by 11.3 percent (to 10,568). Others who represented a single but unidentified racial category grew 52.8 percent (to 349,799), and the number who claimed two or more races grew by 46.6 percent (to 312,926).

The new Census figures underscore the need to encourage more Washington students from all racial and ethnic groups to pursue college degrees and certificates if the state hopes to achieve its ambitious goal to increase educational attainment in coming years.

"Washington employers will continue to import skilled workers from other states and countries because we aren't producing enough college-educated workers to meet their needs," said HECB Executive Director Don Bennett. "This represents a lost opportunity for our state's next generation. The new Census figures highlight the importance of making higher education available and affordable to all in our increasingly diverse society."

Washington's *2008 Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education* called for a 40 percent annual increase in degree production in 10 years to help meet demand for workers with college degrees and certificates. Reduced state support for higher education due to the recession is one of the reasons the state is falling behind in achieving that goal. The HECB will complete an update of the Strategic Plan later this year.

According to data published in the HECB's *Key Facts about Higher Education in Washington*, 49 percent of 2009 Washington high school graduates who were Hispanic or Latino enrolled in college within one year of graduation. That compares to 76 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander graduates, 65 percent of whites, and 47 percent of American Indian/Alaska Natives.

Even so, the state's changing demographic mix is, to some degree, being reflected on Washington campuses. For example, the percentage of students at public baccalaureate institutions who were white declined nearly 7 percent between 1998 and 2008, while the percentage of Hispanics and Latinos increased 2.7 percent.

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